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Let's Give 17 Year-olds a Say On Ticket
By
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On November 4th voters in Connecticut will have the chance to amend our state's constitution to allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries provided those individuals would turn 18 on or before the general election. If this measure becomes law, it would open up the electoral process in Connecticut to as many as 10,000 new young voters. I urge you to vote yes.

Consider some statistics: This year we have witnessed dramatic growth in voter registration among young people. Since January 1, 2008 nearly 100,000 18-29 year olds have become newly registered voters. The excitement and willingness of our young citizens to get involved in civic life is truly inspiring. We should do everything we can to encourage this involvement.

Two years ago, some very dedicated students from West Haven's Notre Dame High School met with me to enlist my help to amend Connecticut's constitution so 17 year-olds could vote in primaries.

They argued the amendment would encourage young people to register and vote, and foster discussion about politics and policy among teenagers and their families. After all, if someone can vote at the age of 18 in a general election, shouldn't they at least have the right to pick the candidates for that election?

Equally as compelling was when the students told me that many of their 17 year-old friends across Connecticut are pre-enlisting for military service and joining the armed forces upon graduating from high school. If our state's young men and women at 17 years of age can make a decision and commitment of that gravity – knowing there is a great chance they will be

deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan – they certainly are capable and mature enough to cast a ballot in primary elections.

In 1965, you had to be 21 years old to vote. Congress lowered the age to 18 in 1971 because of the Vietnam War. Lawmakers believed it was unfair that someone could serve our nation in combat but not have the right to vote in elections that ultimately determine the nation's fate. As our country is once again at war, that same sentiment applies to 17 year-olds.

In Connecticut, more than three-quarters of the State House of Representatives voted in favor of the amendment. In the State Senate the amendment won the support of the chamber's most liberal and conservative members and passed unanimously. Now Connecticut voters have their say.

Federal law allows Connecticut to lower its voting age and the United States Constitution does not deny 17-year-olds the right to vote. The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution simply states that the right of citizens who are 18 or older to vote shall not be denied by the United States or by any state on account of age. Nearly twenty other states have passed similar measures.

There are many reasons for Connecticut to follow suit. Lowering the voting age to 17 for primaries would increase voter participation among young people and help create life-long voters. The earlier in life someone learns a habit, the more likely it is to persist throughout life. It's the same with voting.

The health of any society can be judged by the civic engagement of its citizens. As Connecticut's Chief Elections Official, it has always been my goal to expand voter participation in our state.

Current events make it clear that the stakes of today's elections are high for our future leaders. We are fighting a global war on terrorism while our economy is in a deep recession. Meanwhile, our environment is at serious risk and across the world millions of workers are ready and willing to compete for American jobs.

From the surge in voter registration among young people in Connecticut, it's clear that our young people want a say in the future direction of this country. They want their voices to be heard; so let's show them we are listening. On

November 4th, vote yes on the constitutional question to allow 17 year-olds to vote in primaries.